



STATE OF WASHINGTON

February 1, 2010

The Honorable Richard Conlin, Council President
The Honorable Sally Bagshaw, Councilmember
The Honorable Tim Burgess, Councilmember
The Honorable Sally J. Clark, Councilmember
The Honorable Jean Godden, Councilmember
The Honorable Bruce A. Harrell, Councilmember
The Honorable Tom Rasmussen, Councilmember
The Honorable Mike O'Brien, Councilmember
Seattle City Council
600 Fourth Avenue, 2nd Floor
P.O. Box 34025
Seattle, WA 98124-4025

Dear Councilmembers:

Thank you for your January 28, 2010 letter responding to the recommendation made by the SR 520 Legislative Workgroup on the Westside interchange option. Your willingness to work with us to complete the final design process for the SR 520 Bridge Replacement and HOV Program is greatly appreciated.

As you know, last year's Legislative Workgroup is only the most recent step in an extensive public process that began in 1997. We have been very grateful for the substantial public engagement from a diverse array of perspectives that has informed this process. Your offer to commission the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) to engage with the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) in a technical discussion related to traffic on local Seattle streets, including transit connectivity to the new bridge will contribute greatly to the final design process.

Our primary objectives for any Westside interchange design selected for a new SR 520 are as follows: 1) the design selected must allow the project to be open to drivers in 2014, 2) the design must meet federal and state permitting requirements, and 3) the design must allow the project to be constructed within the \$4.65 billion budget.

With regard to the schedule, we very much appreciate your recognition of our plan to open the replacement floating bridge to drivers in 2014. We share your sense of urgency to correct the critical public safety and seismic issues of the existing floating bridge and its approaches. Maintaining the pace of the necessary regulatory milestones is critical to achieving the schedule

for opening the bridge to traffic in 2014. This includes the selection of a preferred alternative by mid-April 2010. With 13 years of analysis and hundreds of millions of dollars invested in the corridor replacement, we feel strongly it is time to move forward on this much needed safety and mobility project. Therefore, the joint WSDOT-SDOT technical work and council deliberation must be completed within the objectives noted above and must be substantially completed by April 15th.

Your letter references the legislative direction within which we have worked regarding the number and types of lanes to be incorporated into the SR 520 Bridge Replacement. A six-lane configuration was endorsed by the Washington State Legislature in 2007 and 2008. As part of Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 6099 approved in 2007, codified as RCW 47.01.405, the legislature stated that:

"The state must take the necessary steps to move forward with a state route number 520 bridge replacement project design that provides six total lanes, with four general purpose lanes and two lanes that are for high-occupancy vehicle travel that could also accommodate high capacity transportation, and the bridge shall also be designed to accommodate light rail in the future. High-occupancy vehicle lanes in the state route 520 corridor must also be able to support a bus rapid transit system."

We have heard that some may wish to revisit the legislative direction regarding the use of the two additional lanes for high occupancy vehicles (HOV). The Supplemental Draft EIS focuses on alternatives based on the four general purpose lanes – two High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes option resulting from years of previous analyses and public input. Changing the configuration now would require a new environmental process. The office of the Attorney General tells us that revisiting these decisions from several years ago would set the project back at least 18 to 24 months. Our commitment to ensuring public safety does not allow that kind of delay.

The planned four general purpose and two HOV lanes included in the supplemental environmental impact statement best meets the travel needs of this growing region between now and 2030. However, it is important to note that decisions we make now on the design features of the facility do not preclude future options for high capacity transit in the corridor.

Working within the scope of the preliminary work done to date is fundamental to our ability to complete the regulatory steps on schedule. We therefore urge that any recommendations from the SDOT/WSDOT technical discussions that will affect WSDOT's selection of a preferred alternative in mid-April conform to the scope of the Westside interchange alternative recommended by the Legislative Workgroup and past legislative direction. There will be continued opportunities to refine the local elements of Westside interchange option until early fall before WSDOT prepares the final environmental statement.

We know you recognize the budget constraints associated with this project, and share your commitment to making lids and other project features that address impacts on the adjacent

community an integral part of the corridor improvements. These improvements are estimated as part of the \$4.65 billion project budget and we will continue to advance them through the design and environmental process. Work is already underway to reduce the height of the bridge in response to feedback we have received on the proposed design.

We share your interest to increase transit service in this corridor, and the addition of carpool/transit lanes will improve transit service reliability as demand increases in the future. Forty-five new buses will be added to the SR 520 corridor, made possible by the Urban Partnership Agreement between the WSDOT, King County, Puget Sound Regional Council, and federal government. Also, the second phase of Sound Transit funds 100,000 additional service hours to further develop bus rapid transit in the SR 520 corridor. If additional transit service is needed in the corridor, the Washington State Legislature also approved Second Substitute Senate Bill 5433 in 2009, which gave King County the option of raising its property tax for the purpose of expanding transit service in the SR 520 corridor.

Your expressions of support and offer to help advance our design process are both timely and gratefully received. We look forward to working with you, the Mayor and the SDOT to address the issues associated with the Westside interchange options analyzed in the supplemental draft environmental impact statement. We have asked WSDOT to begin to work with SDOT as quickly as possible to develop a schedule and work plan for this effort.

Sincerely,



Christine O. Gregoire
Governor



Mary Margaret Haugen
State Senator, 10th Legislative District
Senate Transportation Committee Chairman



Judy Clibborn
State Representative, 41st Legislative District
House Transportation Committee Chairman

Attachment

The SR 520 Bridge Replacement and HOV Program

History

Project:

- Built in 1963 and now estimated to have 10-15 year life expectancy remaining. Windstorms and earthquakes pose the biggest risks to the structure.
- 1997: Trans-Lake Washington Study made recommendations for a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
- 2000: First broad EIS initiated
- 2005 Draft EIS narrows focus to 6-lane replacement options
- 2006: Governor's report 'A Path Forward to Action' identified the 6-lane alternative as the state's preference
- 2007-2008: Mediation groups review and refine project options with technical support from WSDOT
- 2010: Work will begin on pontoon construction. Supplemental Draft EIS released. The public may comment at a February hearing or through the web until March 8th. Options reviewed are 6-lane bridge replacements: Option A, adds a 2nd parallel drawbridge over Montlake Cut; Option K, adds a tunnel under Montlake Cut and Option L, adds a 2nd drawbridge and elevated interchange.

Previous Legislation highlights:

- ESSB 6099 (2007) required an SR 520 project impact plan to be developed with local input through the use of a mediator.
- ESHB 3096 (2008) Required an SR 520 finance plan, created a tolling implementation committee to evaluate tolling issues and survey citizens, and provided a sales tax deferral for the SR 520 bridge project.
- ESHB 2211 (2009) authorized tolling on the SR 520 corridor, set the maximum budget for the project at \$4.65bn and created a legislative workgroup to make recommendations on the design of the project.